

MESSAGE

OF THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

CALLING

The attention of Congress to the condition of the treasury; also recommending Congress to postpone the day of adjournment.

JUNE 12, 1858.—Read and ordered to lie on the table. Motion to print referred to the Committee on Printing. Report in favor of printing submitted, considered, and agreed to.

To the Senate and House of Representatives :

I feel it to be an indispensable duty to call your attention to the condition of the treasury. On the 19th day of May last the Secretary of the Treasury submitted a report to Congress "on the present condition of the finances of the government." In this report he states that, after a call upon the heads of departments, he had received official information that the sum of \$37,000,000 would probably be required during the first two quarters of the next fiscal year, from the first of July until the first of January. "This sum," the Secretary says, "does not include such amounts as may be appropriated by Congress over and above the estimates submitted to them by the departments, and I have no data on which to estimate for such expenditures. Upon this point Congress is better able to form a correct opinion than I am."

The Secretary then estimates that the receipts into the treasury from all sources, between the 1st of July and the 1st of January, would amount to \$25,000,000, leaving a deficit of \$15,000,000, inclusive of the sum of about \$3,000,000, the least amount required to be in the treasury at all times to secure its successful operation. For this amount he recommends a loan. This loan, it will be observed, was required after a close calculation to meet the estimates from the different departments; and not such appropriations as might be made by Congress over and above these estimates.

There was embraced in this sum of \$15,000,000 estimates to the amount of about \$1,750,000 for the three volunteer regiments, authorized by the act of Congress approved April 7, 1858; for two of which, if not for the third, no appropriation will now be required.

To this extent a portion of the loan of \$15,000,000 may be applied to pay the appropriations made by Congress beyond the estimates from the different departments, referred to in the report of the Secretary of the Treasury.

To what extent a probable deficiency may exist in the treasury between the 1st July and the 1st January next, cannot be ascertained until the appropriation bills, as well as the private bills containing appropriations shall have finally passed.

Adversity teaches useful lessons to nations as well as individuals. The habit of extravagant expenditures fostered by a large surplus in the treasury must now be corrected, or the country will be involved in serious financial difficulties.

Under any form of government, extravagance in expenditure must be the natural consequence, when those who authorize the expenditure feel no responsibility in providing the means of payment. Such had been for a number of years our condition previously to the late monetary revulsion in the country. Fortunately, at least for the cause of public economy, the case is now reversed; and to the extent of the appropriations, whatever these may be, engrafted on the different appropriation bills, as well as those made by private bills, over and above the estimates of the different departments, it will be necessary for Congress to provide the means of payment before their adjournment. Without this, the treasury will be exhausted before the first of January, and the public credit will be seriously impaired. This disgrace must not fall upon the country.

It is impossible for me, however, now to ascertain this amount; nor does there at present seem to be the least probability that this can be done, and the necessary means provided by Congress to meet any deficiency which may exist in the Treasury before Monday next at 12 o'clock, the hour fixed for adjournment, it being now Saturday morning at half past 11 o'clock. To accomplish this object, the appropriation bills, as they shall have finally passed Congress, must be before me, and time must be allowed to ascertain the amount of the moneys appropriated, and to enable Congress to provide the necessary means. At this writing it is understood that several of these bills are yet before the committees of conference, and the amendments to some of them have not even been printed.

Foreseeing that such a state of things might exist at the close of the session, I stated, in the Annual Message to Congress, of December last, that "from the practice of Congress such an examination of each bill as the Constitution requires has been rendered impossible." The most important business of each session is generally crowded into its last hours, and the alternative presented to the President is either to violate the constitutional duty which he owes to the people and approve bills which, for want of time, it is impossible he should have examined, or, by his refusal to do this, subject the country and individuals to great loss and inconvenience.

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"For my own part, I have deliberately determined that I shall approve no bills which I have not examined; and it will be a case of extreme

and most urgent necessity which shall ever induce me to depart from this rule."

The present condition of the treasury absolutely requires that I should adhere to this resolution on the present occasion, for the reasons which I have heretofore presented.

In former times, it was believed to be the true character of an appropriation bill simply to carry into effect existing laws and the established policy of the country. A practice has however grown up of late years to engraft on such bills, at the last hours of the session, large appropriations for new and important objects not provided for by pre-existing laws, and when no time is left to the Executive for their examination and investigation. No alternative is thus left to the President but either to approve measures without examination, or by vetoing an appropriation bill, seriously to embarrass the operations of the government. This practice could never have prevailed without a surplus in the treasury sufficiently large to cover an indefinite amount of appropriations. Necessity now compels us to arrest it, at least so far as to afford time to ascertain the amount appropriated, and to provide the means of its payment.

For all these reasons, I recommend to Congress to postpone the day of adjournment for a brief period. I promise that not an hour shall be lost in ascertaining the amount of appropriations made by them for which it will be necessary to provide. I know it will be inconvenient for the members to attend a called session, and this, above all things, I desire to avoid.

JAMES BUCHANAN.

WASHINGTON CITY, *June 12, 1858.*

